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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, April 9, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "EASTER BONNETS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

I don't know when or where the Easter bonnet tradition started. I have never heard who first put over the idea of celebrating Easter with a new hat. But I am not surprised that the custom, once started, took a firm hold on feminine hearts. Listeners, I leave it to you. Can you suggest anything that will lift a woman's spirit at the end of a long hard winter like a becoming new hat?

Some women buy new hats every Easter. Others, who have a knack at making-over, may remodel last year's bonnet to look like new, thus saving on the spring clothing bill. What I have to report to you today should be of special interest to these fix-overs.

A couple of years ago the clothing people at the Bureau of Home Economics made a study -- or perhaps I should just say they reviewed various successful ways of rejuvenating old hats. So today, with thoughts of the Easter bonnet in mind, I decided that maybe you would like to hear about some of these make-over tricks.

Most hats that have seen wear in other seasons are soiled. So the first thing the home milliner usually needs to do is to clean the old hat.

The cleaning method depends on the material the hat is made of, and also on how soiled it is. The clothing people found that straw hats that were of a closely woven fabric and of a light color -- straws like leghorn or panama or milan -- would often clean nicely by washing in a suds of luke-warm soft water and neutral soap. The method they used was dipping the hat in the suds and scrubbing lightly with a soft cloth, then rinsing thoroughly to remove all soap, and letting it drain for awhile before blocking.

But they found that coarse, loosely woven straw usually can't stand a dip in water. This kind of straw will take only a sponge bath. Too much water makes the straw slip and slide and come apart.

By the way, here's an interesting point about faded color. Some straw hats that had faded improved in color after treatment with a little ammonia in water. The treatment was covering the hat with a cloth wrung out of one-half pint of water with 1 teaspoon of ammonia in it. Black straws often looked fresher after they had been sponged with a mixture of 1 part alcohol to 3 parts water.



The clothing people found that bleaching helped the appearance of many a white straw hat that had become discolored and sunburned. But they found that a badly sunburned straw was often hopeless to try to make over. because the fiber was permanently injured and weakened. Among the bleaches possibly to use at home on old straw hats are: hydrogen peroxide and a mixture of lemon juice and sulphur.

As for adding or changing color, good quality straw will often take dye very well, but cheap old hats, or hats of loosely woven straw are likely to fall apart in the dye bath. The dye to use for a straw hat is one especially prepared for the purpose or one made to color vegetable fibers. Directions on the package of dye are the directions to follow for the job.

By the way, firm straws will often take color well if you dip them in a waterless dye made by dissolving oil paint in a dry cleaning solvent. But dyes with shellac bases and some of the cold-water dyes only go on hats successfully if applied with a brush. Shellac dyes not only color but also give luster and some body to the straw.

After cleaning or dyeing, the next step is blocking the brim. Of course, the ideal equipment for this job is a wooden hat block or mold such as all milliners and reblocking concerns have. But buying a mold in an individual family hardly pays. The clothing people found that they could make satisfactory hat molds by covering an overturned bowl or a deep saucepan -- padding and covering it so that it is smooth and just the size of the head. They fastened the crown of the hat on this mold, pinning it firmly around the base. Then they pressed it with a warm iron and one damp and one dry pressing cloth.

As for the brim of the hat, they stretched and molded that by hand while it was softened by water. Then they pressed it on the underside, a section at a time. They used both a dry cloth and a wet cloth for pressing to avoid scorching the straw.

After cleaning and blocking, some of these old hats looked dull and lusterless. So they brushed them over with a thin coat of shellac -- clear, colorless shellac for light straws and shellac of matching color for dark straws. They found that shellac needed thinning to go on hats, so they diluted it about half and half with alcohol.

Another way to give limp straw a little body is to brush on a solution of gum arabic and water. This is a common sizing for leghorns and panamas that have become limp and floppy.

That's the news about making a new Easter bonnet from an old hat. Just a few ideas picked at random from the clothing people at the Bureau of Home Economics.

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